DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 340 305 HE 025 157

AUTHOR Lawler, Patricia A.
TITLE The Challenges of the Future: Ethical Issues in a Changing Student Population.
PUB DATE Nov 91
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Development; *Adult Education; *Adult Learning; *Adult Students; Andragogy; College Students; Continuing Education; *Educational Principles; Educational Trends; Enrollment Trends; *Ethics; Higher Education; Individual Characteristics; Nontraditional Students; School Demography

ABSTRACT

The increase in the numbers of adult students studying on college and university campuses has created a new set of ethical and administrative challenges for those institutions. Projections for the nineties suggest 50 percent of enrollment will be adults. Characteristically, adult students perceive themselves to be responsible for their own lives; come to education voluntarily; bring life experience to the classroom; have realistic, practical goals for education; and have increased capacity for certain kinds of learning. Issues facing administrations and faculty include recognizing the diversity in student populations and valuing adult learners. The following nine principles can assist institutions as they serve adult students: (1) create a physical and social climate of respect; (2) encourage collaborative modes of learning; (3) include and build on the student's experiences in the learning process; (4) foster critically reflective thinking; (5) include learning which involves examination of issues and concerns, transforms content into problem situations, and necessitates analysis and development of solutions; (6) value learning for action; (7) generate a participative environment; (8) empower the student through learning; and (9) encourage self-directed learning. These principles respect the autonomy of the adult and the continuing development and growth of the student. Included are 24 references. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED340305

The Challenges of the Future:

Ethical Issues in a Changing Student Population

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Patricia Lawler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Patricia A. Lawler, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Center for Education
Widener University
Chester, PA 19013
215-499-4252

November, 1991

HE 025 157

The Challenges of the Future:

Ethical Issues in a Changing Student Population

Introduction

The demographic profile of American and European universities is changing toward a larger proportion of adults in the student population. These students are older, have had more life experience, and have different reasons for attending our universities than traditional age students. Yet they attend universities and colleges that are not designed for their special needs and expectations. This creates many dilemmas for administrators and faculty, both on the level of individual decisions and policy development.

The focus of this paper will be on the challenge created by this situation. The increasing trend of adult students studying on our campuses will be examined, as well as, the characteristics of this "non-traditional" student population. Issues surrounding these students will be identified and ethical dimensions inherent in these situations will be explored. Finally, practical guidelines will be offered for administrators to use in meeting the university's ethical obligations to adult students.

Changing Student Population

Throughout the past fifty years colleges and universities have had increasing numbers of adult students arrive on their campuses. Movements such as expansion of evening schools, the

GI Bill, and the influx of returning women students in the '70's have brought more adult students into higher education. More recently, tuition increases, declines in financial aid, and demographic shifts, including a shrinking pool of traditional students (age 18-24) have reinforced these changes on the campus. Colleges and universities have responded by looking to the adult student as a resource. The response differs from college to college, yet almost all institutions have had some experience with this population.

A nationwide College Board Survey (Aslanian and Brickell, 1988) reported more than six million adults are studying for college credit every year in the United States. The adult share of enrollments on college campuses has grown steadily, with projections for the nineties of over 50% of the student population.

This phenomenon is important for those working in higher education today. A body of research and theory about adult education is now available. A diverse and complex field, adult education encompasses such areas as adult literacy programs, leisure courses, training in business and industry, as well as academic degree programs. This available knowledge and the practical implications of adult education and adult learning can be a rich resource for administrators and faculty in meeting the challenge this population change brings to our campuses. We can use this information to evaluate teaching, programs, and administration, making sure that they are consistent with our knowledge of adult students. Because the students are significantly different from traditional age students, we are ethically obligated to reflect on those differences in our educational institutions.

Characteristics of Adult Students

Being an adult may be defined by age and by roles: "...a person is adult to the extent

that the individual perceives herself or himself to be essentially responsible for her or his own life" (Knowles, 1980, p.24). Adults are considered to have an accumulation of experiences, competencies, and responsibilities which differ form those of adolescents, children, and traditional students. Knowledge of the world and of self are also considered marks of adulthood (Hostler, 1977). Non-traditional or adult students are usually over 25 years of age and have been out of school for some time before resuming their education. Traditional students are considered those who have continued their education uninterrupted from grammar school through college, including graduate school.

Adulthood is not the fixed state it was once thought to be. Developmentalists and psychologists (Erikson, 1963; Sheehy, 1976; Levinson, 1978; Gould, 1978) have pointed out the changing character of adult life with its stages, phases, and transitions. Upon arriving at adulthood we continue to go through a developmental sequence as we age and deal with the challenges of adult life. This sequence can afford opportunities for growth, self-discovery, and self-development. As adults we have responsibilities in our various roles in family, work, and community. Adults also accumulate ever increasing reservoir of life experiences. What does this mean for adults as students? And how are adult students different from the traditional students? We need to look at some of the differences and distinctions.

For the most part adults come to education voluntarily. They seek out an educational experience usually as a result of a "trigger" event in their lives such as, career change, divorce, geographical move, empty nest, loss of employment, or completing a goal begun years before (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980). Education may be a way to cope with a transition in their lives. For the most part the traditional student attends college as an extension of their schooling,

fulfilling the expectations of family and society. In much of America today, it is becoming a necessary next step for most teenagers.

Another important consideration is the fact that the adult brings a wealth of experience into the classroom. This experience can be an asset when it enhances the learning event, adding to the interpretation and complexity of the subject at hand. It may also hinder learning when adults bring memories of their negative educational experiences with them. These can produce anxiety, fear, and a low level of confidence. Traditional students are limited in their experiences and opportunities, and have fewer societal roles to play during their college years.

Adults want their education to have a realistic meaning for them. They want it to be practical and applicable to their life situation. Being goal oriented, adults want to use their learning immediately. Traditional students are also goal oriented today. However, for them application is more likely to happen after graduation and is seen as something to enhance adult life.

Malcolm Knowles (1980), a noted writer and teacher in adult education, has looked at these characteristics and formulated a set of assumptions, which he has named "Andragogy." Knowles defines andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" placing it apart from traditional pedagogy, the teaching of children. He emphasizes respect for the individuality of the learner and the partnership between educator and learner in making decisions, setting goals, planning, conducting, and evaluating learning. This is in contrast to what we usually think of as the teacher-student relationship, that is, one based on authority and expertise with the college acting 'in loco parentis.' Knowles' conception is similar to the professional-client relationship as understood in most professions today. In this relationship the autonomy of the client is

primary and shared decision-making between client and professional is the model for an ethical relationship (Lawler and Fielder, 1991).

Knowles' emphasis on the autonomy of the adults rests on his andralogical assumptions that as individuals mature:

> 1. their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being;
>
> 2. they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning;
>
> 3. their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles;
>
> 4. their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness (pp.44-45).

Many adult education theorists have studied and discussed Knowles' ideas. Brookfield (1986) notes that there is a diversity of interpretations surrounding the idea of andragogy which illustrates the diversity of opinions within the field of adult education itself. However, he sees at the core "The notion of collaboration between participants in an adult learning group, along with the idea that teaching-learning is a transactional encounter" (p. 120), the idea of collaboration between the teacher and the learner, and the importance of the role of past experience.

Cross (1980) in her look at patterns of adult learning reported that adults are capable of learning given consideration for physiological changes of aging. She refutes the notion that as we get older we can no longer learn. According to Cross, the adult student's strength lies in her/his cognitive functions of integrating, interpreting, and applying the information to be

learned.

Issues Facing Administrators and Faculty

If these are characteristics of adult learners, and adult learners are on our campuses, what are the issues facing us? If the adult students have different attributes, goals, directions, and motivations for learning, if they have different physical and sociological characteristics, (most adults have other major undertakings in their lives outside of the classroom), what is our responsibility in understanding and meeting these needs?

The first major issue is recognizing the inherent differences within our student populations. In the United States we are seeing dramatic demographic shifts in our population. This is being reflected on our campuses as well, especially in California and urban community colleges. As we begin to address diversity on our campus we need to understand that it expands to the adult population as well. Adults are different from each other, as well as from traditional students. Our responsibility is to acknowledge these differences and take them into consideration as we plan, administer, and teach.

Another major issues is the value we place on adult students. As financial constraints seize our institutions, many administrators have looked to, and will continue to look to adult students as sources of revenue. Can we as administrators encourage adult students to attend our universities without making a place for them within the system? Recently it was reported in The Chronicle of Higher Education (May 15, 1991) that "...some continuing-education directors worry that institutions hungry for revenue may be looking at their programs as cash cows." If we are going to recruit the adult student to our campuses, then we have a responsibility to take their needs and characteristics into consideration in all aspects of the institution. Subtle

discrimination against adult students needs to be uncovered and eliminated. A useful concept to understand this discrimination is hidden privilege. McIntosh (1988) developed this concept to describe the subtle and invisible ways that our society, and our institutions, discriminate against women and under-represented groups. Applied to universities and colleges, the system of hidden privilege favors the traditional age students. Adult students, although recruited for their tuition dollar, may be treated as second class citizens. Lawler and Fielder (1991) explored this concept in relation to adult students, and reported several areas besides recruiting where the system of hidden privileges work:

> *Social events and sports programming are primarily designed for young people, not adult students;
> *Administrators and faculty assume that being a student is one's primary role, but this is only true of traditional age students;
> *Faculty training and outlook is not based on teaching adults;
> *Scheduling assumes traditional-age, resident students;
> *Children and spouses are typically not included in university planning for students (p. 24).

Gaining an understanding of the uniqueness of the adult student population, and acknowledging the often subtle but systematic discrimination our institutions have in place against these students, are crucial as we face more concrete issues, such as, program development, marketing, financial aid, support services, and teaching. Schlossberg, et al (1989) reported two underlying assumptions that are at work within our universities and colleges...

> ...the main mission of the institution will continue to be to provide student services for traditional-age students who come directly from high school, study full time, live on campus, are totally involved in the institution, and have no other areas of significant responsibility.
> ...there is little payoff in making significant investments to serve adult learners as well (p.209).

Schlossberg and her co-authors see these assumptions as outdated and flawed. As the adult

population on our campuses nears 50%, do we not have an obligation take into consideration these students in our teaching, planning, and services? Many adult educators, Schlossberg included, have underscored the benefits and payoffs to institutions for incorporating adult students in the framework and mission. From another perspective, whatever the payoff, we, as administrators, need to review our ethical obligation to these adult students and the rights they have as they enter our colleges and universities. This is the challenge we face.

Guidelines for Meeting the Challenge

The field of adult and continuing education has provided administrators and faculty with resources to guide their practice in working ethically with the changing student population. The literature contains a theoretical base in which principles of adult education are enumerated and defined (McKenzie, 1984; The Nottingham Andragogy Group, 1983; Mezirow, 1981; Brookfield, 1985; James, 1983; Conti, 1979). A set of these principles was delineated from the literature, observed in adult education settings, and refined to be used by administrators and faculty (Lawler, 1988).

These principles are presented here as criteria of good practice, a benchmark of what can be considered most appropriate in deviltry education to a changing student population. They can be utilized in formulating a standard of ethical practice. Used as guidelines in teaching, advising, and administration, they can help us in our decision making and problem solving.

The Principles of Adult Education

Principle 1: Adult education requires a physical and social climate of respect, that is, an environment which affords students a physical and social climate conducive to adult learning.

Principle 2: A collaborative mode of learning is central to adult education, that is, the involvement of participants, facilitators, and administrators in the design,

implementation, and evaluation of the learning experience.

Principle 3: Adult education includes and builds on the experience of the participant, that is, learning which takes into account the participant's past and present experience.

Principle 4: Adult education fosters critically reflective thinking, that is, learning which involves the examination and questioning of information, values, beliefs, and experiences.

Principle 5: Problem posing and problem solving are fundamental aspects of adult education, that is, learning which involves examination of issues and concerns, transforms content into problem situations, and necessitates analysis and development of solutions.

Principle 6: Learning for action is valued in adult education, that is, learning in which the participant comprehends a situation, takes action in that situation, actually or hypothetically; reflects on the result; and is then able to apply the insight gained to subsequent situations.

Principle 7: Adult education is best facilitated in a participative environment, that is, a learning climate that encourages and facilitates the active interchange of ideas, content and experience, and the active involvement of each participant.

Principle 8: Adult education empowers the participant, that is, learning which facilitates an awareness that one possesses the means to influence or change his or her environment.

Principle 9: Self-directed learning is encouraged and enhanced in adult education. that is, learning in which the participant initiates and/or controls the learning process (Lawler, 1991).

The Principles have as their foundation the belief in the autonomy of the individual adult and respect for the person who is continuing to develop and grow throughout adulthood. This foundation also incorporates the belief that education is a transforming process in which the student exercises control and direction. The adult student is seen as taking a more active role with the focus of the learning transaction shifted from teacher-centered to learner-centered.

The Principles are useful as a guide for assessing our own value system and that of our

institution with regards to various segments of our changing student population. Roger Hiemstra (1988) calls for educators of adults to analyze their personal values and philosophy in terms of their professional actions for practical application. His call is not restricted to the adult educator. As the statistics show, more and more of us in higher education deal with the adult student.

The Principles and their inherent philosophy can also guide us as we meet the challenge this increasing population brings to our colleges and universities. Using them in combination with an ethical decision making model, acknowledging our obligations and the rights of our students, will facilitate our ability to frame our questions and seek ethical solutions.[1]

Conclusion

Taking the Principles of Adult Education as a criteria of good practice we can assess our own philosophy of education and the methods of delivery for our educational plan. We can analyze our institution's mission statement and the cultural and social considerations that contextually influence our work. The impact of adult students on our campuses and in our classrooms is more than a statistical consideration, more than a monetary advantage. It is a shifting of perspective in which we must consider the uniqueness of this population and work on meeting their needs.

---

[1]Resources for ethical decision making include Robinson, G.M. & Moulton, J. Ethical Problems in Higher Education, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985; Sola, P.A. (ed.) Ethics, Education and Administrative Decisions, New York: Peter Land, 1984; Lawler, P. and Fielder, J. "Analyzing Ethical Problems in Continuing Higher Education: A Model for Practical Use," The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, Vol. 39, (2), Spring, 1991, pp. 20-24.

REFERENCES

Aslanian, C. B. and Brickell, H. M. Americans in Transition: Life Changes as Reasons for Adult Learning, Princeton, NJ: College Entrance Examination Board, 1980.

Aslanian, C.B. and Brickell, H.M. How Americans in Transition Study for College Credit, New York: College Entrance Examination Broad, 1988.

Brookfield, S. D. Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.

Conti, G. J. "Principles of Adult Learning Scale," Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979.

Cross, K. P. Adults As Learners. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980.

Evangelauf, J. "More Than Half of All 1987 College Students Were 22 or Over, U.S. Reports," Chronicle of Higher Education, June 28, 1989, p. 1.

Erikson, E. H. Childhood and Society, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1963.

Gould, R. Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978.

Hiemstra, R. "Translating Personal Values and Philosophy into Practical Action." In R. G. Brockett, Ethical Issues in Adult Education, New York: Teachers College Press, 1988.

Hirschorn, M. W. "Students Over 25 Found to Make Up 45 Pct. of Campus Enrollments," The Chronicle of Higher Education, March 30, 1988, p. A35.

Hostler, J. "The Education of Adults," Studies in Adult Education, 9, (1), 1977, pp.58-64.

James, W. B. "An Analysis of Perceptions of Adult Educators from Five Different Settings," Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings, Montreal, 1983.

Knowles, M. The Modern Practice of Adult Education, New York: Cambridge, 1980.

Lawler, P. The Keys to Adult Learning: Theory and Practical Strategies, Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools, 1991.

Lawler, P. and Fielder, J. "Analyzing Ethical Problems in Continuing Higher Education: A Model for Practical Use," The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, Vol. 39, (2) Spring, 1991, pp.20-24.

Lawler, P. A. Workplace Education and the Principles and Practices of Adult Education, Unpublished Dissertation, New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1988.

Levinson, D. et al. The Seasons of a Man's Life, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.

McIntosh, P. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," Working Paper No. 189, Wellesley College, Center for Research on Women, 1988.

McKenzie, M. "Adult Education and the Burden of the Future," In S. Merriam (Ed.), Selected Writings on Philosophy and Adult Education, Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1984.

Mezirow, J. "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education," Adult Education, 32, 1, Fall, 1981, pp. 3-24.

Niclklin, J.L. "As Enrollment in Continuing Education Booms, Some Fear Programs Will Be Used as Cash Cows," The Chronicle of Higher Education, Vol. XXXVII. (35), May 15, 1991, pp. A1, A31.

Nottingham Andragogy Group, "A Concrete Model and Theory of Andragogy," In Nottingham Andragogy Group, Towards A Developmental Theory of Andragogy, University of Nottingham,/ Department of Education, 1983.

Schlossberg, N.K., et al. Improving Higher Education Environments for Adults, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989.

Sheehy, G. Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life, New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1976.